DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 410 574 CS 215 925

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TITLE "Unison in Variety, Congeniality in Difference": Sifting beyond the Multicultural Sieve.
PUB DATE 1997-03-00
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (48th, Phoenix, AZ, March 12-15, 1997).
PUB TYPE Opinion Papers (120) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Cultural Context; *Cultural Pluralism; Ethnic Groups; Ethnicity; Higher Education; *Individual Development; *Self Concept; Self Esteem; Student Needs
IDENTIFIERS *Identity Formation; Rhetorical Strategies

ABSTRACT

Multiculturalism and its attendant meanings have undergone several metamorphoses. Among many reasons, rapid technological change, the media of mass communication, easy world travel, and availability of higher education are altering both the way individuals look at their culture and the way cultures look at the individual's sense of self, leaving all elastic and in flux. A new cosmopolitanism is emerging wherein the sense of self becomes a matter of cultural crafting through "self-fashioning"--an increased self-consciousness about the fashioning of human identity as a manipulable, artful process. This is exemplified by a group of individuals whose national or cultural identity is mixed by virtue of migration, overseas education, or parentage. Multicultural ontology is a cognitive exercise entailing a complex analysis of the facets within, while a new text is constantly constructed through merging different spheres of discourse while continuing on one. But what can be the possible rhetorical strategies whereby a syncretistic self-culture organizes itself? In "Woman in the Nineteenth Century," Margaret Fuller's major rhetorical design works within connecting several margins of discourse context, each producing cumulative epistemological meaning. In the final analysis, multiculturalism as a pedagogical practice, more than a celebration of ethnic or gender diversity, should play an intimate role in the weaving and reifying of a path to students' critical understanding and their enlightened and creative learning. (Contains 51 references.) (CR)

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ED 410 574

"Unison in Variety, Congeniality in Difference": Sifting Beyond the Multicultural Sieve

To be presented at the 1997 CCCC Convention
March 12-15, Phoenix, Arizona

By

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English, Collage of DuPage

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I. Culture and Multiculture:

Since its first appearance in the English language in the New York Herald-Tribune Books in 1941, the expression multicultural, hence multiculturalism, and its attendant meanings have undergone several metamorphoses as the term applied to define one's American identity and its authenticity. In the history of civic education in the United States, the process of self-definition has undergone several stages: the ideology of Anglo-conformity, for instance, by which the assimilation of "alien" children to Anglo-American middle class and self-image was achieved, or the Melting Pot concept whereby the foreign elements were to be transmuted into a new American self or, more recently, Cultural Pluralism in which ethnic individuals share a common American citizenship and loyalty while maintaining and fostering their particular languages and cultures.[1]

Today we seem on the verge of another brave new world. Rapid technological change, media of mass communication, cross-racial marriages, the rise of mass culture, easy world travel, availability of higher education, and a development of catholic tastes in popular consumption and commodities are altering both the way individuals look at their culture and culture looks at the individuals' sense of the self, leaving both diverse cultures and the diversity of individuals elastic and in flux. The traditional notion assumed that a multicultural identity was primarily one of the essentialized ethnic and/or gendered self built into the popular images of the Other or Outsider, but it does no longer appear to carry sufficient explanatory or symbolic value under these global life-realities. A new cosmopolitanism is emerging, and one's sense of the self is becoming a matter of cultural crafting through "self-fashioning" - "an increased self-consciousness about the fashioning of human identity as a manipulable, artful process"[2] as exemplified by a group of individuals that one ethnographer calls "halfies" - "people whose national or cultural identity is mixed by virtue of migration, overseas education, or parentage."[3] The unsettlers of the boundaries of static cultural integrity, these halfies reside in the multiple cultural spaces and languages, thus rendering what has been thought of as multicultural components - race, gender, class, origin, sexual orientation, and the like - as "the raw materials from which an individual constructs a

life."[4] For halfies, multiculturalism means the potentiality of forming an identity as more than a member of one race or gender; it has something more to do with one's epistemology and ontology calling for a more appealing yet a just conception of the individual self built upon a faith in transcending the given, in entering a new field of possibilities. I may tentatively term it a syncretistic self-culture grounded in a humanistic multiple-perspective in which the diversity within the self - one's embracing more than one "culture" - signals a universally liberating act of creative literacy.

II. Multicultural Discourse and "Epistemological Privilege":

I invoke this symbolic discourse self as a point of entry into pedagogic exchanges and connectedness. More specifically, for a culturally grounded critical approach - approach in which the social sense of the self is central and in which a strategy to order a diversity within the self can be extrapolated - I turn to Mikhail Bakhtin' notion of "the otherness" (a non-Western being). In one of his essays titled "Response to a Question from the Novy Mir Editorial Staff," he reverses the customarily negative status of "the Other" into one of significant creative possibilities. Bakhtin suggests that the Other exercises a special vision from the outside through which he, she, or they can see what the insiders cannot:

> There exists a very strong, but one-sided . . . idea that in order better to understand a foreign culture, one must enter it, forgetting one's own, and view the world through the eyes of this foreign culture. . . . Of course, a certain entry as a living being into a foreign culture, the possibility of seeing the world through its eyes, is a necessary part of the process of understanding it; but if this were the only aspect of this understanding, it would merely be a duplication and would not entail anything or be enriching. Creative understanding does not renounce itself, its own place in time, its own culture; and it forgets nothing. In order to understand, it is immensely important for the person who understands to be located outside the object of his or her creative understanding - in time, in space, in culture. . . . In the realm of culture, outsideness is a most powerful factors in understanding. It is only in the eyes

> of another culture that foreign culture reveals itself more fully and profoundly (but no maximally fully, because there will be cultures that see and understand even more.)[5]

The passage describes the process of obtaining what is called "epistemological privilege" where the Other's mind moves transformatively toward creative knowing and understanding of self and others. The basic idea is that one can better know the center from studying the margins because one examines things more closely and because one looks at them in fresh, inventive ways. In this sense, the margins can be unexpected sites of discovery, education, and creative energy as well as of focused identity. At the heart of Bakhtin's reconceptualized Other is the contextual frame and its salutary effects. The Other straddles various margins as discourse contexts. To be on one margin means to be a part of the context of another margin, which in turn interacts with yet another margin's context and so on, resulting in one's translating and endowing overlapping margins with new meaning and new perspectives. Something similar occurs to a multicultural mind, with a recognition of many webs of shifting, unfixed selves, each possessing its own unique voice encoded with a set of values and knowledge. Although the multicultural self, like the concept of the Other, begins with internal splits, such splits - like the shifts from constructing one mode of the Other to constructing another new different mode of the Other while losing neither the order nor the essence of each - yield a more informed fashioning and understanding of one's identity and those outside of it. Multicultural ontology therefore is a cognitive exercise entailing a complex analysis of the others within, while a new text is constantly constructed through merging different spheres of discourse while continuing on one.

III. Multiculturalism and Composition: Rereading Margaret Fuller's Woman in the Nineteenth Century in the Light of Bakhtin's Ontology and Dialogic Imagination

As a composing self, how does one order such diversity within? What can be possible rhetorical strategies whereby a syncretistic self-culture organizes itself? How,

for instance, does a halfie like myself (a Japanese female who was brought up in a multi-deity society, educated in the American parochial system in Hiroshima, converted to Catholicism, did graduate work in Milwaukee and Chicago and, in the process, has been fashioning an identity of "Homo academicus"[6] teaching Freshman English in DuPage County of Illinois) or my so-called multicultural students produce a text which can overcome the sense of the otherness and at the same time revitalize and participate in the realm of the discourse with the center? In what manner, indeed, can a halfie - an unfixed self - bring his or her epistemological privilege to enrich the larger debate about text and its creation?

I am currently at the very beginning of a project for which the working title may run something like "Fashioning an Academic Discourse Through Multiple Identities as Connected Thinking" and for which Margaret Fuller and her Woman in the Nineteenth Century play a major inspiration and a foil to Bakhtin's dialogism. Fuller attracts me first as an ontological framework which examines forms and expressions of subjectivity. A nineteenth century counterpart of a contemporary halfie herself, she advocates a multiple sense of selfhood, strongly resonating with the notion of the multicultural self I have been describing. In one of her letters, she writes, "we are not merely one another's priests or gods, but ministering angels, exercising in the past the same function as the Great Soul in the whole of seeing the perfect through the imperfect nay, making it come there."[7] She regards the self as the vehicle of a connective power offering a "more permeable sense of ego boundaries."[8]

A passage in Woman in the Nineteenth Century, from which the quotation in my presentation title derives, is a case in point.[9] Fifth-way into the work, Fuller describes a zodiac of the paired busts of Greek gods and goddesses to underscore her utopian vision of gender relations in the 19th-century America. She suggests that just as those mythological males and females exist in heaven-blessed harmony symbolized by the circle of the Zodiac, earth-bound males and females can also coexist in similar symmetry and accord. She observes that differences remain ("Male and female heads are distinct in expression" W 255) but they no longer mark the masculine as superior, nor the feminine as inferior, as society will have us believe; they are, rather, modes of

being, "equal in beauty, strength and calmness" (W 255). She further intimates that the characteristics designated as either male or female are to be cultivated by both sexes as shared and shareable as in a family ("Each male head is that of a brother and a king - each female of a sister and a queen") (W 255). The ontology of each gender so conceived signals a creation of an ideally integrated society where "unison in variety, congeniality in difference" (W 255) can become the natural state of the human condition, one element balancing and depending on another in a reciprocal and complementary manner. Furthermore, such a state of unison and congeniality - difference and interdependence - can occur within an individual. This terse yet eloquent passage is meant to disrupt her culture's assumption of the fixed boundaries between male and female, self and other, and looks forward to Bakhtin's concept of the Other as an ontologically protean yet culturally more embrasive, empowered being.

For my purpose, then, Fuller's enriched confidence in an ontology of subjectivity leavens her rhetorical mode and I find it charged with possibilities for classroom applications. A prototype of the Bakhtinian dialogic method, Fuller reveals a composing self in dialogue with oneself and the world,[10] her responses accommodating several types of connected thinking: logical argument, expressive writing, empiric inquiry, objective analysis, cultural interrogation, and textual mediation of multiple positions and voices, all of which hallmark critical activities integral in academic discourse and composition.

Fuller's major rhetorical design works within connecting several margins of discourse context, each producing cumulative epistemological meaning. One of them is that of polemics with the discourse self "I" at the center, who is intent on questioning and analyzing existing gender hierarchies and accepted sexual practices. Another is the discourse margin of Fuller's autobiographical Miranda and her lived experiences presented as personal narratives, which, however, are elevated toward the end of the work to the realm of the universal as she compares her own experience to that of the experience of all women. The third is a margin created by an anonymous correspondent whose discourse moves beyond the context of personal experience in an examination of empiric evidence drawn from myth, folklore, poetry, history, and her

closely observed realities in her own time. The last margin is a brief discourse of the fictive "irritated trader" who wants to maintain control and authority over his wife, and who is used as a point of conflict and objections and thus acts as a counterpoint to Fuller's argument.

Grounded in subjectivity, Fuller's writing gives a partial answer to the question of whether it is possible for a multicultural self to write as an authentic writer apart from the society-expected discourse. Her solution is a multivocal discourse, to write as the Other whose marginalized status is negotiated in a plurality of voices. Her discourse is one of decoding and interpreting through the eyes of successive Others, each having its distinctive voice. Polivocality for Fuller's composing self is a mediational device through which she moves from one culture to another overcoming the sense of the otherness. She utilizes all these heterogeneous discourse models as various modes of connected thinking so as to test ideas, values, life-realities, and received "wisdom." Fuller's multivoiced text is also a device to clarify the process by which she finds her own voice through what Bakhtin calls "appropriation" of language. One's language is not wholly one's own until a discoursing self "populates it with his own intention, his own accent . . . adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention."[11] Fuller seems to agree that no writer's text is ever fully finished, completely freestanding unless one places oneself within the discourse of others. In terms of Fuller's universe, her successive identification with Others within is the formal organizing principle of both her writing and her identity.

Though they are separated by time, gender, country, and ethnicity, reading Margaret Fuller and Mikhail Bakhtin yields much similar insight. One insight I can take to my classroom may be the message that students are multicultural beings whether they are aware of or admit it or not (for instance, one can be Asian-American, 35 years old middle-class gay Catholic who is a father to his adopted daughter and a son-in-law to the-now-divorced parents of his ex-wife, etc.). It is true that such elements as ethnicity or gender sharply highlight differences, but these differences are more to do with historical and social situation and context, rather than one's individuality. Ontologically, it is more to do with one's maintaining a hold on one's multilayered

consciousness (which preserves both differences and integrity of the "margins" and the "center"). In life as well as in writing, we assume multiple identities. The rich contribution of identity formation to writing, in this new cosmopolitan era, lies in its opening up venues to an even richer variety of connected thinking.

Another insight is one about assignments. I want my students to write about the lives of themselves and of others. First, journal writing will be assigned so that students will explore self-consciously the process of fashioning their private and public identities. Private identities will be fashioned by recording their "real" selves (a form of self-reflective writing focused on their perceptions of their daily lives) and their "fictive" selves (a form of creative writing whereby students imagine and enact a variety of roles for themselves). Public identities will be fashioned by recording their socially specified selves and examining the authenticity of such identities. Formal writing assignments will evolve around the multidisciplinary approach, with special emphasis on the concept of the Other (or outcasts) in history, literature, and anthropology. I want my students to examine society's need for and dependency on the Other. I want them to evaluate how we construct knowledge of other people's lives and thoughts. I want them to gauge their objectivity, sincerity, political stance, moral and ethical imperatives, ideological maturity, intersections with and reflections of their lives, and the like, as they reflect on the concept and figures of the Other.

In the final analysis, multiculturalism as a pedagogic practice needs be more than a facile reductionist celebration of ethnic or gender diversity that tends to gloss over the ever shifting complexity and subtlety of today's culturescapes or of individuals' minds and hearts. Rather, it should play an intimate role in the weaving and reifying of a path to students' critical understanding and their enlightened and creative learning. For my part, the challenge will become to have students see themselves in new and expansive freshness - their interdependence, connectedness, and commonality, as well as variance - more than they may have so far understood or believed. In the end, multiculturalism may be reclaimed for its ethical and intellectual splendor made even more luminous with a returning to our humanist roots in which one's authentic and individual humanity is embraced, privileged, and honored.

Notes

1. On the assimilation process of new citizens, see Philip Gleason's "American Identity and Americanization," in Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups, ed. Stephan Thernstrom (Cambridge, MA, 1980). For a comparative history of ethnic groups, see Ronald Takaki's A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America (1993). A good reference on the Anglo-American elitism is E. Digby Baltzell's The Protestant Establishment: Aristocracy and Caste in America (1964).

2. Stephen Greenblatt: Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare. Chicago & London: The U. of Chicago P, 1980. 2, 257. It will not be too far-fetched to find affinities between Renaissance texts and contemporary multicultural discourses both of which involve boundary-crossing, the shaping of one's identity, and one's experiences being molded by forces outside one's self.

3. This is a term which was coined by Kirin Narayan according to Lila Abu-Lughod who quotes it in her examination of the implications of the traditionally accepted notion of culture: "Writing Against Culture" in Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present, Ed. Richard G. Fox (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 1991), 137.

4. Loury, Glenn C. "Individualism before multiculturalism." The Public Interest 121 (Fall 1995): 94. While Loury's thesis is developed focusing on one "ethnic" group - blacks - mine is more inclusive.

5. Speech Genres & Other Late Essays. Trans. Vern W. McGee. Ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: U of Texas P, 1986. 6-7. "Epistemological privilege" is Tzvetan Todorov's understanding of Bakhtin's "exotopy," signifying one's "outsidedness." He uses this particular expression to explain the status of the exile, a mode of being the Other, in Nous et les autres: La Reflexion francaise sur la diversite humanine (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1989 - see Weiss below for more information), 390. My preference to Todorov's expression is based simply on its more identifiable expressivity of what I am pursuing at this point. For more about "exotopy," refer to Tzvetan Todorov: Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle , trans. by Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis, London: U of Minnesota P, 1984), 94-112. An illuminating study on the subject of the exile is Timothy F. Weiss's On the Margins: The Art of Exile in V. S. Naipaul (Amherst: The U of MA P, 1992), especially its "Introduction," which first introduced me to Bakhtin's "exotopy." It is the gist of his introduction I have summarized and recast to highlight my sense of multicultural ontology, and to whose bibliography I am indebted for the entire note section here.

6. This is an expression I have borrowed from the following work: "Global Ethnoscapes: Notes and Queries for a Transnational Anthropology" by Arjun Appadurai in Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present, 200.

7. The Letters of Margaret Fuller. Ed. Robert L. Rush. Hudspeth, Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1983. 214, 175.

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8. Chodorow, Nancy. The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender. Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of California P, 1978. 93.

9. Margaret Fuller. Woman in the Nineteenth Century. In The Portable Margaret Fuller. Edited and with an Introduction by Mary Kelley. New York: Penguin Books, 1994. 228-362. Hereafter the work will be cited as W. My primary inspiration about Fuller's work is Annette Kolodny's "Inventing a Feminist Discourse: Rhetoric and Resistance in Margaret Fuller's Woman in the Nineteenth Century. New Literary History." 25(1994): 355-382. On different interpretations, see the following: Charles Capper. "Margaret Fuller as Cultural Reformer: The Conversations in Boston." American Quarterly. 39.4(Winter 1987): 509-528; Marie Mitchell Olesen Urbanski. Margaret Fuller's Woman in the Nineteenth Century: A literary study of form and content, of sources and influence. Westport CN, London, England: Greenwood Press, 1980.

10. Mikhail Bakhtin. Trans. Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1984. 54.

11. Mikhail Bakhtin. The Dialogic Imagination. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: U of Texas P, 1981. 293-94.

A Partial Bibliography To Accompany "'Unison in Variety, Congeniality in Difference': Sifting Beyond the Multicultural Sieve"

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